

Montana Prairie Dog Working Group

Billings

February 25, 2009

These notes are organized by topic not order of agenda. 2002 Conservation Strategies and progress on these strategies are inserted where appropriate.

Review of working group & discussion of it's future

Working group membership: A request was sent with the first notice of this meeting for anyone wishing to be taken off the working group list to contact Lauri H-B. Five names were removed due to retirement or job change, ten additional names were removed for either lack of interest or time, or because of a change in job focus. One request to be removed from the list was denied...nice try Ryan Rauscher!

New group leadership: Lauri H-B thanked Allison Puchniak-Begley for her hard work as leader of this group since 2005. Allison has done a great job of meeting organization, information sharing, and accomplishments monitoring. APB has a new role within Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) that is more regionally focused; Wildlife Biologist/Nongame Specialist for Regions 4 and 5. Lauri H-B is assuming most of the statewide duties, including leadership of this working group, as statewide Nongame/T & E Species Bureau Chief out of the Helena MFWP office.

USFWS review of species status

Lou Hanebury provided listing status updates for white-tailed (WTPD) and black-tailed (BTPD):

WTPD: review period has been extended through May 2010. Service is accepting comments until July 1, 2009 (FWS, Salt Lake City.)

Group discussion: Would an HCP/umbrella CCAA help protect MT from listing of the WTPD?

Action Item: Explore the possibilities of an HCP or CCAA and include mountain plovers and burrowing owls in discussion.

LAURI H-B, JOANN DULLUM, ALLISON P-B, LOU HANEbury, JAY PARKS, STEVE FORREST, KRISTI SWISHER

Action Item: Contact Omelia Orton-Palmer for information on HCPs and CCAAs.

LOU HANEbury

BTPD: USFWS will make a decision by November 2009 regarding status;

- Unwarranted, warranted but precluded resulting in a candidate species status, or warranted followed by proposed rule to list (with 60 day comment period).

- USFWS has 'unofficially' extended the comment period to May 1, 2009.

- USFWS acknowledges they are lacking good data. Lou stated incoming state data is indicating an increase

- in occupied areas. However, information is lacking on activity within those areas.

- MFWP (Scott Story) could provide a statewide map of colony locations however data would include out-dated information. (Idea tabled for further discussion.)

- USFWS could really use county-based information on plague die offs.

Action Item: MFWP will provide additional data to the USFWS upon completion of the 2008 assessment. RYAN RAUSCHER, SCOTT STORY, LAURI H-B

USFWS 90 day finding for black-tailed prairie dog

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/btprairiedog/73FR73211.pdf>

Landowner Incentive

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Modify existing programs and develop new programs that compensate private landowners and DNRC for having prairie dogs on their lands

STATUS: The Landowner Incentives Subcommittee is currently working with NRCS. The subcommittee will continue to investigate all options for incentives such as the Farm Bill (WHIP, EQIP, CSP), HPP or the federal Landowner Incentive Program.

Landowner Incentive Subcommittee: Allison P-B, Pete Husby, Joann DULLUM, Randy Matchett, Sterling Miller, Jane Roybal, Ken Blunt, Linda Poole, Lou Hanebury, Kristi Bly (new)

Unfortunately, neither Linda Poole nor Ted Toombs was in attendance to provide updates on ongoing work. Directive from the last meeting was that Ranchers Stewardship Alliance (RSA) was going to gauge local interest in landowner incentives. Environmental Defense (ED) is working on a grasslands initiative that is not specific to prairie dogs. RSA and ED are working collaboratively and exploring new programs including a Conservation Innovation Grant program, (NRCS web site: 'the Conservation Innovation Grants are aimed at helping achieve and promote innovation in critical areas such as water quality, energy, climate change and pollinator habitat.)

Larger incentive subcommittee has been fairly inactive this year however there are lots of ideas to explore including new NRCS programs, (e.g., SAFE and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative).

Report #1: Jane Roybal briefed the group on the Northern Cheyenne program:

- Tribe received a \$150,000 TLIP grant. The idea was to tie the incentives to ferret reintroductions (42 ferrets have been introduced.) Payment is \$10/prairie dog acre with a one time payment at the beginning of a 10 year agreement period.
- Challenges have included; getting the tribal finance group to spend the money, finding willing landowners, obtaining potential participant (landowner) names from BIA, and a clear need for education of the community.
- Expansion of a colony is addressed in agreements and includes a financial bonus.
- Written agreements conditions are similar to the wildlife extension agreements.
- Question remains as to whether payments should go to the tribes or the leasees.
- Tribes can and have been signing the acreages as no hunting/poisoning zones.
- Support for the program overall has been good.

Report #2: Big Lake Basin is a privately owned property outside of Billings that is adjacent to some MFWP lands. The property is a dried up lakebed that is currently occupied by prairie dogs. The property does not qualify for EQIP because on a map it is classified as a lakebed, although EQIP in itself could be made suitable as a program to protect prairie dogs. GRP and WHIP are also NRCS programs that can benefit prairie dogs, although none of these programs were specifically designed with prairie dogs in mind.

-MFWP is trying to design a conservation program to maintain the property for prairie dogs, burrowing owls and ferruginous hawks. Initially landowners were going to poison but they didn't necessarily want to make the investment so they were looking for other options. The ultimate goal of the landowners may be to sell the property.

-Purchasing the property or putting it under MFWP easement would add to the MFWP Big Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Could waterfowl stamp money be used in this case?

Report #3: In 2008 MFWP did purchase the Yellowstone WMA. This WMA encompasses 300 acres of currently occupied black-tailed prairie dog habitat. Two thirds of the prairie dog town lies within the school state trust lands section of the WMA.

-Shooting is currently allowed but access to the prairie dog towns is difficult and not accessible by vehicle. If MFWP was interested, they could impose a shooting closure on the MFWP lands.

-A portion of the purchase was for a new state park where there are no prairie dogs.

WHIP/EQIP were well funded this year.

-Steve Forrest (WWF) inquired about how we get some of those dollars for prairie dog conservation.

-Local WHIP/EQIP working groups would need to OK a local project. Opportunity in Phillips County?

-We need someone to work with local conservation districts.

-Ryan Rauscher submitted a State Wildlife Grant funding proposal in 2008 for a prairie dog landowner incentive program. Funds were directed to another program.

Action Item: NRCS will contact area supervisor to discuss implementation options and ways to gain local support for using programs such as EQIP, WHIP, or GRP for prairie dog conservation.

LARRY MURPHY

Action Item: NRCS will work with MFWP to put together presentation for local conservation districts.

LARRY MURPHY, ALLISON PUCHNIAK-BEGLEY

Action Item: Contact Linda and Ted to get updates on their work. Coordinate their efforts with Landowner Incentive Subcommittees efforts. Schedule a subcommittee meeting for coordination? Focus on making the approach less prairie dog and more prairie.

KRISTI BLY, JOANN DULLUM

Action Item: Contact Pete Husbey (NRCS) for statewide perspective and to gauge interest of new State Conservationist.

ALLISON PUCHNIAK-BEGLEY

Action Item: Identify areas for local incentive efforts, e.g. Ashland.

LOU HANEBURY, LARRY MURPHY, JANE ROYBAL

Action Item: Conference call soon to check progress on the above action items!

LOU HANEBURY, ALLISON P-B, LARRY MURPHY, PETE HUSBY, JOANN DULLUM, KRISTY BLY

Conservation Reserve Program

Glenn Patrick (FSA): Enrolled CRP acreage has decreased from 39 to 32 million acres nationally.

-In 2008 USFWS and MFWP sent a letter to FSA requesting increased flexibility in a landowners requirement to maintain ground cover. Old rule stated prairie dogs had to be removed to maintain cover.

-State committee now allows landowner to manage for cover *or* prairie dogs.

-FSA will consult with USFWS if and when acreages >80 acres are up for renewal and have prairie dogs.

-FSA would like to know where ferrets are being put and where ferrets currently are to inform contract decisions. FSA would like to involve USFWS when acreages have potential for ferrets.

-Could translocations play a role? If landowner wants to manage for cover rather than prairie dogs could they give the dogs away to a willing taker away? (Further translocation discussions below.)

-Does a landowner with >80 acres of prairie dogs have to survey for ferrets before removing the prairie dogs? Not currently.

Action Item: FSA and USFWS will continue discussions and produce a list of guidelines for when it's most important to keep prairie dogs versus cover. This will include consideration of acreage, ferrets and other potentially affected species like burrowing owls.

GLENN PATRICK, LOU HANEbury

Action Item: Finalize notice for the county FSA folks on options for maintaining prairie dogs.

GLENN PATRICK, LOU HANEbury

Action Item: Provide guidelines to FSA regarding requirements for surveying ferrets on prairie dog occupied acreages.

LAURI HANAUSKA-BROWN, LOU HANEbury

Action Item: MFWP will work with FSA to identify counties where ferrets are or may be present.

GLENN PATRICK, SCOTT STORY

Conservation Easements

Action Item: Brainstorm the best ways to word conservation easements agreements and conditions to protect prairie dogs *and* the fluid nature of burrow complexes.

GRANT BRONK (FWP), LAURI H-B, JOANN DULLUM, JANE ROYBAL, RYAN RAUSCHER, BARBARA COZZENS

Monitoring

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Inventory and monitor prairie dog distribution and abundance

STATUS: FWP allocated State Wildlife Grant funding to mimic Colorado's aerial line-intercept method to estimate occupied black-tailed prairie dog acreage in 2008. Efforts are also being made to evaluate the use of aerial photography (specifically NAIP imagery) to map prairie dog acreage.

Monitoring Subcommittee: Allison P-B, Randy Matchett, Craig Knowles, Joann Dullum, Bobby Baker, Pat Fargey, Steve Roth, John Carlson, Marco Restani

Report #1: Statewide aerial surveys for black-tailed prairie dogs in Montana (MFWP)

-Project goal: statewide estimate of occupied acreage with a reasonable confidence interval.

-Methodology has been peer reviewed, however some debate still remains among reviewers.

Survey stratified by county. Tribal lands not surveyed.

Flight lines flown east to west. Spatially balanced.

Average flight altitude = 300 ft. Average flight speed = 110 mph.

Effort allocated by known information, precision, dollars.

Activity level: sighting of dogs, cleared vegetation, mounds with vegetation.

Both observers had to agree on colony start, only one had to say when they were out.

Ground squirrel mounds and anthills initially confused data collection however observer experience and ground truthing quickly corrected this confusion.

Ground truthing; minimum of one transect per stratum (county).

If any intercept was inaccurately recorded by species then all intercepts in the county had to be rechecked.

-Results: Colonies detected in 21 counties

~750 colony intercepts recorded

Long colony intercepts can have great influence on the final estimate.

Ground truthing effort was just to check the start and end point of the recorded intercept.

Ground truthing generally resulted in longer occupied intercepts than aerial record.

Ground truthing surveys resulted in very few differences in activity level from aerial surveys.

Action Item: Circulate briefing of final results to working group upon completion.

RYAN RAUSCHER, SCOTT STORY

Report #2: Montana Natural Heritage projects (Bryce Maxell)

MNHP maintains the point observation database in conjunction with FWP. Currently have ~750,000 animal observation records. Observation records are used to create Species Occurrences that are used in environmental reviews and predicted distribution models that have a variety of applications.

-Please be sure to get field data to MNHP!

Mapping prairie dog towns off of 2005 National Agricultural Imagery Program images as a project to meet objectives under Prairie Dog Conservation Plan: to be completed by November 2009.

- Funding by Miles City BLM (\$30,000), FWP (\$5,000), MNHP (\$5,000).
- Mapping includes visual examination of color imagery and color infrared imagery from the 2005 flights to identify vegetation contrasts and burrow patterns at the 1:65,000 and 1:10,000 scales and burrows at the 1:3,000 scale. A grid of 100 x 100 meter grid cells will be used for coding as active or recently active towns versus non-active towns. Gaps of more than 100 meters will lead to mapping towns as individuals. Attempts will be made to use pattern recognition software to speed up mapping effort.
- This will provide an estimate of prairie dog acreages that can be compared to other survey results.
- This can be used to update the Maximum Extent Layer in FWP's Prairie Dog Database.
- Lots of towns in the current Prairie Dog Database are not mapped or are mis-mapped.
- BLM and MNHP may collect some limited ground data this summer for verification of the 2009 images. Please report observations of towns to assist with mapping efforts.
- Mapping is scheduled to be completed by November 2009.
- NAIP will be flown again in 2009, but not likely available until 2011.

Predicted distribution models will also be used to aid mapping.

- Recent flight and ground truthing data will be used to evaluate mapping efforts although this will be slightly complicated by different timing of imagery and flight or ground surveys.
- After mapping is completed GIS analysis will be used to identify complexes under the Prairie Dog Conservation plan using both the 7 km and newer 1.5 km rules. This can be used to identify Category 1 complexes for potential reintroduction of black-footed ferrets.

Working on statewide predictive modeling for a number of species including the prairie species.

- Predicted Distribution Model is based on 15 environmental layers, e.g., slope, soil, maximum summer temp, minimum winter temp, etc. and both continuous and binary model outputs are created.
- Uses only positive observation data to come up with predictive model
- Models have so far performed very well in areas with surveys, but have performed poorly in areas lacking surveys for a few species.

Action Item: Circulate briefing of final results to working group upon completion.
BRYCE MAXELL

Translocation

An ARM rule-making process to establish guidelines and criteria to guide future prairie dog translocation was conducted in 2004 and new ARMs governing translocation became effective on August 3, 2004. Translocation EA is good through 2011.

Translocation subcommittee: Joann Dullum, Craig Knowles, Steve Forrest, Allison P-B, Jay Parks, Robert Lubbers, Monty Sullins, Lou Hanebury, Kristi Bly

Action Item: Develop approach of maintaining lists of potential release sites and potential donor sites. Maintain these lists in FWP Regional offices. Use for translocation planning.
SUBCOMMITTEE

Action Item: Summarize translocation protocols to streamline and simplify. Work with FWP legal staff to ensure accuracy in policy interpretation. Circulate the summary to the translocation subcommittee.
ALLISON P-B

Action Item: Clarify allowable activities for translocation of prairie dogs from CRP lands. Included in the ARM rule as written?
ALLISON P-B, GLENN PATRICK

Action Item: Clarify needs and plans for CMR translocation efforts.
LAURI H-B, RYAN RAUSCHER, JOANN DULLUM, LOU HANEURY

Action Item: Clarify needs and plans for Crow Reservation translocation efforts.
LAURI H-B, ALLISON P-B, JANE ROYBAL

White-tailed prairie dog translocations

Draft report available from Allison P-B.

- Allison P-B and Jay Parks (BLM) are collaborating on this project.
- Thirty-five prairie dogs were translocated in 2007 and another 9 in 2008. A private landowner allowed trapping on his lands. Other prairie dogs came from the proposed highway project area (all private lands.)
- At least 5 litters were observed on the release site in 2008.
- Plans for 2009 include bringing prairie dogs in from Wyoming. Lack of permitting by Department of Livestock held this plan up in 2008. Montana D of L veterinarian wants quarantine and testing.
- Any prairie dogs translocated in 2009 will go to a different, historically occupied site.
- No more Monkey Pox exemptions required.
- Translocation EA is good until 2011 (5 years total).

Action Item: Continue working with D of L and Wyoming. Plan to test all captured dogs for plague.
ALLISON P-B

Plague

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Address human health risks and concerns by developing and distributing information on prevention and recognition of plague in humans and publicize factual information on human health risks.

STATUS: The Plague Subcommittee has been charged with working with MT DPHHS to revise and re-format an information brochure about plague that was published by DPHHS some years ago. No pamphlet or public education effort currently in the works. Subcommittee needs direction and interaction with DPHHS and working group. There is some concern that a pamphlet may stir up more concern and eradication of prairie dogs than is warranted.

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Determine how plague and other significant diseases operate in the wild and how they can be managed.

STATUS: Wildlife Services is covering much of the disease monitoring. TNC is mapping twice a year on their lands. CMR is monitoring annually and can look at survival with ear tags that have been put out during capture. Region 6 landowners are supposed to contact MFWP with plague reports, but we could do a better job of asking for this data.

Plague Subcommittee: Lou Hanebury, Randy Matchett, Jennifer Ramsey (FWP), Jerry Wiscomb, Tim Vosburg?

Al Pfister (USFWS) in Grand Junction is the new plague management coordinator for the Service.

Report #1: Wildlife Services monitors plague in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control. Wildlife Services has been testing animals, mostly coyotes, with Nubuto strips. These are control coyotes, so the testing is secondary to the control. Some tularemia testing is also underway...no positives to date.

2005 –2006: 406 samples from 41 counties: 10 positive counties: 22 sero-positives.

(None in Phillips County or Garfield even though there were samples from there.)

2007: 990 samples from 52 counties: 14 positive counties: 62 sero-positives

(Garfield County had some positives but still none in Phillips.)

2008: 1,543 samples from 52 counties: 21 positive counties: 154 sero-positives.

(Phillips County did have some positives.)

Action Item: MOU is needed between the North Cheyenne and Wildlife Service to allow the take and testing of coyotes on tribal lands.

JARVIS GUST/JOANN ROYBAL/JERRY WISCOMB

Report #2: Craig Knowles speculates that 75% of the prairie dogs in Phillips County were lost during the Fall/Winter of 2007.

Report #3: CMR dusted 38,400 burrows on 2,000 acres in 2008.

2007: 162 prairie dogs were captured for plague testing. 51 positives.

2008: 228 prairie dogs were captured for plague testing. 15 positives.

Prairie dogs were 'ear clipped' if captured in 2007. Four of these clipped prairie dogs tested positive when captured in 2008. One juvenile was sampled and came back positive indicating it had been exposed during its' first summer.

CMR portion of Phillips County lost 47% of occupied acreage between 2004 and 2007.

335 more acres disappeared in 2008 all of which were located in the ferret release site.

Report #4: TNC lands are monitored twice a year for plague.

Action Item: TNC will look into a data sharing agreement with MNHP and/or FWP to exchange plague information.

BARBARA COZZENS, BRYCE MAXELL, SCOTT STORY

SUBCOMMITTEE TASK: Prepare list of sites that are being monitored for plague and evaluate if these are enough. Use these sites as reference to summarize what's happening statewide.

SUBCOMMITTEE TASK: Design a method for plague outbreak information submission by the public and agency personnel that includes a list of questions that we need answered. Explore ideas to engage the shooting community in reporting plague outbreaks.

Plague symposium

Lou Hanebury and Randy Matchett attended the 'Symposium on the Ecology of Plague and its Effects on Wildlife' in Fort Collins in November. There was lots of discussion on vaccines, titer production, and oral vaccines.

Science is a couple years out from a predictive model of plague outbreaks.

Symposium on the Ecology of Plague and its Effects on Wildlife:

<http://www.fort.usgs.gov/Plague/PlagueProgramAbstracts.pdf>

MFWP Prairie Dog Literature Review

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Stay abreast of new scientific information that identifies factors that influence prairie dog population dynamics (e.g., physiography, soils, vegetation, grazing, predators, shooting, range sites, distribution and connectivity, genetic health, and weather.

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Document the degree of competition between prairie dogs and domestic livestock, and resulting economic impacts.

STATUS: FWP STATE WILDLIFE GRANT funded literature review will provide an overall view of research and identify research needs.

-Carolyn Nistler has been contracted through MFWP to complete a literature review of current and peer reviewed prairie dog literature. Research efforts and findings on key issues need to be addressed including, but not limited to; 1) Effects of sport shooting, 2) Effects of disease including sylvatic plague, 3) Effects of parasite control on prairie dogs and non-target species, 4) Efficacy and cost of population control methods, 5) Efficacy and cost of translocation, 6) Methods to facilitate colony expansion, 6) Natural dispersal, and 7) Methods to estimate occupied acreage at a various spatial scales. Rough draft is due April 1; final draft due June 1, 2009.

-She needs to know of any new available literature, particularly on effects of shooting and effects of parasite control on non-targets.

Action Item: Review current list of literature that Carolyn is considering and look for gaps.
WORKING GROUP

Ferret Releases

Report #1: Northern Cheyenne Reservation, 8 ferrets from Turner Ranch in AZ were released on tribal lands in February, 2008. Two groups of kits (n=9, n=11) from Conata basin and 14 others that came from the captive breeding facility have also been released.

-Spotlighting on the Reservation has detected some animals without micro chips. At least two litters have been produced.

-Some unvaccinated ferrets have been released.

-Prairie dogs continue to do well in the release sites; expansion from 5,700 acres in 2006 to 8,000 acres in 2008.

-Tribe is starting to dust the ferret release sites (~12,000 burrows dusted to date. WWF purchased the chemical.

-Additional releases are planned for 2009.

-Most likely will survey in March

Action Item: MOU is in the works between MNHP and BIA to exchange information (so ferret release sites can be entered into Tracker).

JARIVS GUST/BRYCE MAXELL

Report #2: CMR, Fall 2008 surveys found both that both females on the refuge had litters. Total observed during the Fall survey = 10 ferrets.

-No releases planned.

-Spring surveys on the CMR to begin March 30.

Report #3: Canadian introduction of ferrets seems to be on track (Steve Forrest, WWF).

-Will the transporters need a permit if they choose to drive the ferrets through Montana?

A permit from Department of Livestock is not necessary to simply transport ferrets through the state. (Lauri H-B)

-2009 possible release sites: Grasslands National Park, Canada

Jelm mountain, WY

Fort Carson, CO

Bad River Ranches (Turner Endangered Species Fund site) in SD

Interstate Ferret Conservation Team

-Arnie Dood (MFWP) and Randy Matchett (CMR) attended the multi state Black-Footed Ferret Conservation Team meeting.

-Montana black-footed ferret working group will meet late summer or fall of 2008. Arnie is the lead.

Action Item: Develop complex site map that will guide classification of Category 1 complexes. Identify how ferrets fit in with designation of Category 1 complexes and Region 6 PDIC plan.

BRYCE MAXELL/RYAN RAUSCHER/ARNIE DOOD

Land Management plans

CMR is currently re-writing their EIS plan, 'Comprehensive Conservation Plan.'

-Comments being accepted on the web.

BLM Resource Management Plans

-Miles City office is slated to have a final plan by 2011.

-Billings office is a little behind Miles City.

-Lewistown office is on hold.

Grass Banking

Barbara Cozzens (TNC) defined grass banking for the group. This program allows ranchers to graze cattle on TNC Matador ranch at a discounted AUM price in exchange for conservation efforts on the home ranches, e.g., conservation efforts for plovers, owls, prairie dogs, sage grouse leks. Shooting is no longer allowed in the agreement for the home ranch management. Poisoning was already excluded.

Mountain Plover/Burrowing Owl monitoring

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Determine how many, where, and the juxtaposition of black-tailed prairie dogs required to support viable populations and distribution of species associated with prairie dogs.

STATUS: WWF has ongoing surveys for plovers and owls. Miles City BLM works with oil and gas companies to survey plovers and owls. Iowa State University is surveying plovers in Phillips County.

MFWP planned to initiate a statewide survey for these two prairie species in 2009, however, State Wildlife Grant funding and state matching funds have fallen short. This work has been delayed until 2010.

Humane Society of the U.S. (Dave Pauli)

HSUS office provided \$3,500 to USFWS for Conata Basin fencing and \$1,000 for burrow dusting project

House bill 443

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Establish authority for conservation of prairie dogs as “nongame wildlife in need of management” (87-5-101 through 87-5-122, MCA) while simultaneously maintaining existing authority to control prairie dogs as pests (7-22-2207(6) and 80-7-1101, MCA), within the context of this plan.

STATUS: 2009 legislative session is considering House Bill 443.

At this time Montana statute shows that both species of prairie dog are classified as vertebrate pests meaning MFWP cannot implement shooting closures or other management regulations like we can for other species. House Bill 443 is an attempt to get dual status back. Bill Sponsor: Mike Menahan, Lobbyist: Janet Ellis (Montana Audubon).

What HB443 is: a bill simply allowing for species to have dual classification. Currently only the bison has a dual classification (livestock and wildlife). In this case the prairie dog could be both nongame and vertebrate pest. MFWP shooting closures and regulations can follow only if this bill passes

What HB443 is not: an automatic classification of prairie dogs as nongame species ‘in need of management.’ This ‘extra’ designation would require MFWP commission approval. This bill is also not prairie dog specific. It covers all wildlife currently not classified under MFWP rule.

February 24, HB 443 passed out of the house on a 53-47 vote.

Detailed bill information for House Bill 443:

[http://laws.leg.mt.gov/laws09/LAW0203W\\$BSRV.ActionQuery?P_BLTYP_BILL_TYP_CD=HB&P_BILL_NO=443&P_BILL_DFT_NO=&P_CHPT_NO=&Z_ACTION=Find&P_SBJ_DESCR=&P_SBJT_SBJ_CD=&P_LST_NMI=&P_ENTY_ID_SEQ=](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/laws09/LAW0203W$BSRV.ActionQuery?P_BLTYP_BILL_TYP_CD=HB&P_BILL_NO=443&P_BILL_DFT_NO=&P_CHPT_NO=&Z_ACTION=Find&P_SBJ_DESCR=&P_SBJT_SBJ_CD=&P_LST_NMI=&P_ENTY_ID_SEQ=)

[To clarify our debate regarding the classification of bats: MCA 80-7-1101: Vertebrate pests are defined as jackrabbits, prairie dogs, ground squirrels, pocket gophers, rats, mice, skunks, raccoons, bats, and the following depredatory and nuisance birds: blackbirds, cowbirds, starlings, house sparrows, and feral pigeons, when they are injurious to agriculture, other industries, and the public. Bats are considered ‘wildlife’ by the Department of Health and Human Services along with fox, raccoon and skunk.]

Wild Earth Guardians ‘Annual Report from the Burrow’

Montana’s ‘score’ dropped from a D in 2008 to a D- in 2009. Most likely due to no change in the legal status, unregulated shooting, and lack of plague monitoring.

Wild Earth Guardians ‘Report from the Burrow 2009’

http://www.wildearthguardians.org/Portals/0/support_docs/report_pdog_from-the-burrow_2009.pdf

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Prairie Dog Conservation Team meeting

Lauri H-B attended for Montana. Other states represented: AZ, OR, KS, SD, UT, CO, WY, TX

WTPD Conservation Plan is near completion

- WTPD survey debate: Original WAFWA range-wide survey protocol did not allow surveying from aircraft. WTPD activity is difficult to determine from an aircraft. WY flew their transects anyways, mapped complexes, and estimated acreage. CO argued that WY significantly veered from the range-wide protocol and therefore needs to do second flights and/or ground surveys. WY argued their methods are adequate and since they have 75% of the WTPDs they *are* conducting a range-wide survey all on their own.
- WY estimate is 2,893,487 colony acres (84% classified as healthy).
- Independent committee to review and evaluate survey methodologies.
- WAFWA (Bill VanPelt) will be soliciting the states for data on WTPD for the USFWS.

BTPD state updates and survey discussion

- States had committed to survey every three years. Three years is thought to be better than five because of the frequency of plague on the landscape.
- Team agreed to every three years with an evaluation after 10 year time period.
- Team will look into forming a review committee to look into survey efficiency, cost, time and accuracy.
- WAFWA (Bill VanPelt) solicited and summarized state data for BTPD 90 day finding review.

WAFWA Grasslands Initiative = Grassland Strategic Plan

Middle tiered plan to assist states with prioritization of conservation efforts.

- Coordinated effort for impacting numerous species with one effort.
- Plan should work within the direction of the CFWCS by providing extra guidance on coordinated conservation of grassland ecosystems.

Public Affairs/Education

2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Establish a subcommittee of MPDWG members charged with 1) identifying information needs, 2) compiling information that addresses those needs, and 3) developing a draft format for presenting the information and 4) solicit public relations expertise from the various agencies to develop implementation strategies and a public relations plan.

STATUS: Subcommittee is not currently working on education materials or programs.

Public affairs/Education Subcommittee: Jane Roybal, Ken Blunt

Dave Pauli and the Billings Zoo are working on a 'prairie ecosystem' display for the zoo to be completed by 2011. Suggestions were made to Dave to contact North Dakota to look at their 'sod buster' trunk and NWF to look at their 'prairie dog trunk'. Dave will contact the subcommittee or working group members for more suggestions or assistance if needed. Kudos to Dave and the Zoo for their efforts!

Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan Implementation**2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Regional prairie dog abundance and distribution standards.**

STATUS: Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan completed in 2006, (http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1074.aspx). Implementation of the plan is underway. Next meeting of the PDIC will be in Fall 2009.

STATUS: Similar prairie dog planning efforts need to be completed in FWP administrative regions 3, 4, 5 and 7.

Region 6 is the only region with a plan as directed by the 2002 conservation plan.

-Acreage and distribution objectives:

1 Category 1 complex of at least 5,000 acres

6-8 Category 2 complexes of 1,000 or more acres (>2 following the 1.5 km rule)

Category 3 complexes to be scattered throughout historic range in Region 6

-Execution of plan to be overseen by implementation committee (PDIC).

-First priority of committee is to establish Category 1 complex including coordination with landowners, development of strategies, etc.

-American Prairie Foundation is willing to host the Category 1 complex

-Category 1 complex should have defined boundaries...acreages would need to facilitate expansion to create the complex. Translocation and burrow dusting are tools to be used. Choteau County has expressed some interest in donating prairie dogs for translocation.

-Current road blocks for Region 6 plan right now are the lack of a landowner incentive program and the initiation of a Category 1 complex.

Other regions will soon begin working on their own plans using this one as a template.

-Region 7 planning process is high on the list of Regional priorities, but it will not begin until the NAIP project is completed.

-Region 5 planning process is included in Allison P-B's performance plan, but is also on hold for a better statewide distribution perspective. Greatest challenge is Region 5 will be the need for an effective landowner incentive plan.

-Region 4 planning process is scheduled for 2009-10. First People's Buffalo Jump State Park (formerly Ulm Pishkun) is writing it's own prairie dog management plan.

-Region 3 planning process is scheduled for 2009-10. Claire Gower (MFWP) has been collaborating with local biologists on potential conservation easement in the region and will coordinate Region 3 plan completion.

-Crow, Northern Cheyenne, and Fort Belknap Reservations all have prairie dog management plans.

Sport Shooting**2002 CONSERVATION STRATEGY: Assess the impacts of shooting activity.**

STATUS: Results of the State Wildlife Grant funded shooting study in S. Phillips County (2001) were reviewed by subcommittee. Summary has not been completed. FWP sponsored literature review will include consideration of shooting studies.

Shooting Study Reviewers Subcommittee: Linda Poole, Rod Boland, Cecil Hawkins, Randy Matchett, Joann Dullum, Steve Forrest, Marco Restani, Ryan Rauscher, Sterling Miller, Ken Blunt, Dale Veseth

Action Item: Contact Linda for the reviews that were submitted and explore getting those comments out to the group in some format.

LAURI HANAUSKA-BROWN

New Subcommittee- Sport Shooting (Community Involvement, Revenue, Regulations, Outfitting):
Lauri H-B, Allison P-B, Ryan Rauscher, Rod Boland, Ray Mulè,

This committee is going to look into the world of prairie dog shooting and explore the possibilities of

- involving the shooting community in data collection and management discussions,
- regulating outfitters and involving them in data collection and management discussions,
- financial revenue from the shooting community, e.g., resident/nonresident licenses,
- maintaining shooting as an accessible activity for youth as part of hunter recruitment efforts.

Note: 90 day USFWS finding did indicate shooting was a factor, but not a factor in itself.

Next meeting/future communications

Updates from the subcommittees and individuals with assignments will be requested every three months between meetings. These updates should be concise bulleted lists of accomplishments that Lauri H-B can send directly to the working group.

Action Item: Set up a website and list serve for this group. This would be a great way to share information.

BRYCE MAXELL, LAURI H-B

Thanks to all who made the trip to Billings and invested the time!